UNITED
NATIONS

A E

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

A/52/114
E/1997/46
10 April 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Fifty-second session
Items 101 and 120 of the
preliminary list*
OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES
FOR DEVELOPMENT
JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Substantive session of 1997
Item 6 of the provisional
agenda**
COORDINATION, PROGRAMME
AND OTHER QUESTIONS

Review of financial resources allocated by the United Nations system to activities by non-governmental organizations

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Review of financial resources allocated by the United Nations system to activities by non-governmental organizations" (A/51/655-E/1996/105, annex).

---

* A/52/50.

** E/1997/100.

97-09711 (E) 290497

/...

ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Review of financial resources allocated by the United Nations system to activities by non-governmental organizations"

I. GENERAL COMMENTS

1. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) has found the report to be a useful contribution to the policy-level discussions taking place within the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly on relations between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as on the role of national NGOs in the country's economic and social development. The Committee has noted that the present report represents the continuation of dialogue on the issue of NGOs started in the previous report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Working with non-governmental organizations: operational activities for development of the United Nations system with non-governmental organizations and Governments at the grass-roots and national levels" (A/49/122-E/1994/44). It also expressed its appreciation that JIU undertook the study which contains a financial analysis and a comparison of costs involved in United Nations/Government/NGO activities, as requested by ACC in its comments on the earlier JIU report (A/49/122/Add.1-E/1994/44/Add.1).

2. The main purpose of the latest report was to examine the rules and procedures related to the allocation of funds from both regular budget and extrabudgetary sources for activities carried out by NGOs on behalf of the organizations of the United Nations system that provide funds to NGOs as implementing partners. Therefore, the scope of the study was limited to the allocation of resources by organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, as well as the United Nations funds and programmes that are financed by voluntary contributions.

3. ACC agrees that it is important and timely to analyse the changes in the institutional environment within which the United Nations system operates, and in particular to take account of the more active role being played by certain elements of "civil society" in the areas of development and humanitarian assistance. The Committee, therefore, supports the general thrust of the report in favour of enhanced operational cooperation of the United Nations system with NGOs, and believes that the study provides useful information on the current status of NGO cooperation with the organizations of the United Nations system. That information may serve as the basis for an inter-agency assessment of programme and operational issues to be undertaken by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions.

4. In general, ACC members found the report informative, well-conceived, comprehensive and balanced. They concur, in principle, with the conclusions and recommendations of the JIU, particularly in view of the fact that many of the proposals contained in the report are already being progressively implemented by organizations and agencies under their NGO policy guidelines. However, in some

instances the report was found to contain a number of shortcomings which, to some extent, diminished the value of the study.

5. First of all, in the view of ACC members, the report does not take sufficient account of the broad variety of NGOs, whose roles, operational procedures and financial requirements are quite different, ranging from large international organizations to national support NGOs and representative peoples' organizations.

6. It is also unfortunate that the scope of the report is restricted to the narrow situation in which a transfer of funds between the organizations of the United Nations system and NGOs is involved. And even while the study alludes to some broader issues of NGO cooperation, such as the need for focal points or capacity-building, it tends to view this cooperation solely from a funding perspective. In this regard, some agencies would like to mention that in their cases, activities involving a transfer of financial resources represent only a minor part of collaboration with NGOs, and therefore such differences within the United Nations system should be taken into account in a future review of operational cooperation.

7. Some ACC members believe that even within the narrow perspective of assessing flows of resources, it would be opportune to distinguish among several quite different types of interactions with NGOs. First, NGOs may be contracted to carry out, on behalf of United Nations system organizations, activities they have not been involved in formulating. In those cases, NGOs play the same role as that of any contractor or subcontractor and should therefore compete with others for the awarding of contracts, and the same procedures regarding accountability for funds received should apply. Second, an NGO may be allocated funds by or through a United Nations system organization to carry out activities that provide support to the its own programmes or those formulated jointly, where the role of the NGO is that of beneficiary or partner. In that case the criteria for selection of partners and the accounting procedures would be different than in the first case. Finally, NGOs may coordinate their programmes with those of United Nations system organizations and plan and implement parallel and mutually supportive activities without any transfer of financial resources. In that case no issues of financial accountability are involved. This is a form of NGO operational cooperation, which, in the view of ACC members, is likely to increase considerably in the future.

8. With regard to the financial management of resources devoted to NGOs, ACC members agree with the need for a better accounting and reporting procedure, however they are not convinced that the resulting ability to produce comparative statistics will be particularly useful, since the operating budgets of organizations and agencies are very different and their individual needs in terms of cooperation with NGOs are fully adapted to their respective roles and mandates. Moreover, some ACC members are of the opinion that better procedures for the selection, efficiency and accountability of NGOs do not necessarily require criteria distinct from those generally applicable to any partnership with external bodies involving funding. It is in the selection of those NGOs with which official relations are established that there is still a need for more precise criteria in many United Nations bodies. The careful selection and screening of NGO partners will guarantee the sought-after improvement in

efficiency and accountability regarding the use of financial resources allocated to them.

9. Some ACC members draw attention to the report's assumption that NGOs are pivotal in building equitable and stable societies. It is indisputable that in many countries NGOs have played an important role in providing basic services to remote and marginalized communities, denouncing violations of human rights, fighting for the establishment of democratic regimes, etc. However, the growing financial opportunities offered to NGOs by the funding agencies have resulted in the appearance of NGOs that often lack social commitment and technical competence, as well as a clearly identified clientele. In such a situation, the pertinence and usefulness of the above assumption is obviously weakened.

10. Some United Nations entities expressed reservations relating to the comment of the JIU that "the United Nations Secretariat, which usually does not finance NGO activities, is not concerned with all the recommendations". That statement is not entirely accurate, as demonstrated below.

11. The United Nations Secretariat does deal increasingly with NGOs. Thus, for instance, the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development has an NGO unit, and so does the Department of Public Information, both of which are financed from the United Nations regular budget. Also under the budget of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development for the biennium 1996-1997, a grant was approved by the General Assembly for financing the Non-Governmental Liaison Service. In 1995, recognizing the need to enhance cooperation between the United Nations and NGOs, the Secretary-General designated his Special Adviser as the focal point in the Executive Office on all the matters pertaining to NGOs.

12. Furthermore, the United Nations Secretariat did finance the participation of a number of NGOs in the major United Nations conferences, in particular those from the developing and least developed countries, through various trust funds established for those conferences. Seminars, workshops and other activities involving NGOs in the preparation of and follow-up to those conferences were also financed by the United Nations Secretariat. It should also be mentioned that the initiatives taken by the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development to establish a common NGO database and to develop better outreach and arrangements for NGO participation in intergovernmental processes do involve financial implications as well. The above facts on increasing involvement by the United Nations Secretariat in supporting NGO activities should not have been overlooked by the JIU.

13. Similar comments were made by the regional commissions. In the case of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, for instance, although there is no direct provision of funds to NGOs as implementing partners, there is close collaboration between the Commission and the NGOs in the implementation of its technical cooperation projects financed from extrabudgetary resources, especially in areas that have an impact on poverty alleviation, such as reproductive health and family planning, population ageing, urbanization, environment, social development, including women in development, the disabled, etc. The cooperation of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia with NGOs involves the direct and indirect participation of NGOs, volunteers and

local communities by means of formal agreements and mechanisms for the implementation of projects. There is a continuous dialogue with the NGO community, which facilitates the exchange of information on major issues of concern. The Commission also provides technical and substantive advisory services to the NGO community and invites it to assume a partnership development role in mobilizing operational activities at the country level. In the European region, cooperation between the Economic Commission for Europe and NGOs does not include financing activities carried out by NGOs, but, on the contrary, NGOs, by their in-kind contributions, provide support to many activities carried out by the Commission. The regional commissions would be willing, if the study on NGO relations with the United Nations is supplemented in the future, to contribute information based on their rich experience.

14. Some ACC members have commented that while JIU devotes almost 20 pages of its study to describing how different agencies and programmes of the United Nations system allocate resources to NGOs and select the recipients, it does not clearly identify those practices considered best and worthy of adoption by other agencies.

15. Several agencies found it contradictory that, on the one hand, the report states that the accountability for funds going to NGO activities is insufficient and, on the other hand, it appeals for a better reporting on the resources allocated to NGOs.

16. Some ACC members mentioned that the report repeats the initiatives already taken by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions and therefore does not break new ground.

17. The representative of the World Bank commented that while the text regarding its activities in the area under consideration was accurate and complete, the phrase in paragraph 131, "the Bank can play a mediating role" should be continued to include "... but still would need government agreement", thus reinforcing the message that the borrower determines the use of NGOs, not the Bank.

18. Finally, ACC members are of the view that one of the most important aspects of working with NGOs is the need for flexibility. This should, however, be balanced with the need for accurate information relating to financial resource expenditures vis-à-vis non-State partners. In the attempt to achieve accuracy through databases, policy guidelines and reporting procedures, flexibility may become more difficult to achieve. In turn, NGO partners may in fact become increasingly bureaucratized and less flexible in meeting the needs of the poorer segments of society. It should also be remembered that many NGOs have limited organizational and financial capacities and may not be able to meet established standards. There are instances in which financial accountability is matched with operational effectiveness; in particular, the small-grants programmes of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are an excellent example of this synergistic potential. The tripartite institutional arrangements of those programmes facilitate an environment in which each actor (NGO/Government/UNDP) has a vested interest in programme quality and therefore allocates financial resources in a cost-effective and efficient manner. It is this type of arrangement that can ensure accountability and transparency.

II. COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

All United Nations system organizations collaborating with NGOs in carrying out their tasks should establish a transparent financial management procedure by compiling and maintaining a database on their activities with NGOs. Such a database will also be useful as a way of measuring trends and recording experience as well as any other relevant information in cooperation with NGOs. This database should include, among others:

(a) All projects with NGO partnership, the project title and duration, beneficiaries, total budget and source of funds, the affiliated NGO and its type collaborating in the execution and/or implementation of projects;

(b) The percentage of the total project budget which goes to direct programme execution/implementation and that allocated to administrative support costs when applicable.

19. With regard to this recommendation, many ACC members comment that they have for a number of years maintained a computerized database on their activities with NGOs, covering both project agreements and budgetary and financial information. These systems are maintained, as a rule, by a special unit established within the respective secretariat for NGO matters. In the case of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for instance, the database is supplemented by a second database, maintained by the Office of the NGO Coordinator, which contains information on all the NGOs that have an interest in refugees, whether they are UNHCR implementing partners or not. Updated information from the latter database is published regularly as an NGO directory.

20. Other organizations and agencies are in the process of systematizing data on their activities with NGOs, which will include NGOs involved in their work, those in consultative status, NGOs and other organizations of civil society at the country level that could be potential partners in implementing development projects, as well as specific information on the type of cooperation provided and resource allocation. Within the UNDP structure, for example, the Civil Society Organizations Programme is currently working towards developing a series of guidelines that will enable UNDP country offices to start gathering data on NGOs and other organizations of the civil society (membership groups, trade unions, advocacy groups, etc.) so as to form country-level databases, as well as to appoint full-time focal points for civil society within those offices, as suggested in recommendation 2. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that UNDP programmes are often executed jointly by United Nations system agencies and national government ministries. In that case, NGOs can be subcontracted at any time for specific activities (training, evaluation, etc.). The resources required for those activities are provided in a lump sum to an NGO, blurring the administrative and operational costs. One possible solution to this problem is to allow for NGO execution that would provide exact figures. Unfortunately, this has yet to become an operational reality. In this context, establishing a database may offer insight into NGO functions, capacities and legitimacy, but may not provide the needed data. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the

United Nations (FAO) is in the process of establishing a database on its activities with NGOs, which is not viewed primarily as a tool for financial management. It will include references to projects carried out in partnership with NGOs, but not to minor NGO subcontracts.

21. Several ACC members had some difficulty in agreeing with the JIU proposal that all the United Nations system organizations should establish and maintain a database on NGOs, which, they believe, needs to be considered in the context of financial and staff constraints facing the United Nations. Their main argument is that the limited number of projects involving NGOs and the small amount of funds allocated for such projects would not justify the costs of establishing the requested database. They also stress that the present administrative framework of the United Nations system is complicated enough without compounding it with additional reporting formats. In their view, it would have been preferable if the Inspectors, who had the opportunity to examine the existing procedures of various United Nations organizations, had provided recommendations for introducing simpler and more meaningful programmatic and financial reporting. Such recommendations should fully take into account the ongoing process of streamlining United Nations administrative procedures and the introduction of the Integrated Management Information System.

22. Some ACC members, while agreeing in general with the proposals contained in this recommendation, note that the report does not include the cost of a project on establishing and maintaining a database for transparency in financial management. They stress that such projects require not only upgraded technology, but also skilled human resources. They refer to the recent efforts by some United Nations entities, such as the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Department of Public Information, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Non-Governmental Liaison Service, to avoid duplication by building a shared database of records about NGOs that are involved in the work of more than one entity, thus improving the dissemination and collection of information and the maintenance of records and facilitating access to a wide number of NGOs by sector, gender and geographic location. This type of common database could be used at Headquarters as well as in the field.

23. One ACC member proposed that, as a first step towards improving the access to information on NGOs being held by various agencies, programmes, funds, departments, divisions and other entities, an inventory of various NGO databases in the United Nations system should be established. That member believed that such an exercise, already undertaken by the Advisory Committee for the Coordination of Information Systems in 1988, would help to assess the situation and to find the best way for establishing an integrated database on NGOs, as requested by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1996/31, part XI, of 25 July 1996.

Recommendation 2

United Nations system organizations recognize that the tasks of both "operational" and "advocacy" NGOs at the international and national levels are essential if the system is to achieve its objectives. In response to a recent decision of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions, an inter-agency assessment of whether there is a need for establishing an

inter-agency mechanism which would bring together NGO focal points on programme and operational issues is currently under way. The increasing responsibilities require and merit full-time NGO liaison officers to follow and coordinate the activities of NGOs.

(a) At the headquarters level, operational organizations which have not already appointed an NGO liaison officer should do so in order for him/her to consult, on behalf of the organization, with NGO umbrella organizations, bilateral and multilateral donors, other United Nations agencies and different NGOs. The person in question should be informed regularly by the Budget Division on the status of allocation and expenditure of resources to NGO activities, as well as be involved in and provide inputs to the preparation of the budget dealing with NGO activities (see recommendation 3).

(b) At the country level, coordination with the Government, other national institutions and local NGO umbrella organizations should be assigned by each organization/agency to a national United Nations officer who has an understanding and appreciation of the local culture. He should carry out this function under the direct supervision of the Chief Technical Adviser (CTA) and, where there is no CTA, one of the agency staff members with similar functions who should be accountable and responsible for the management of the organization's resources devoted to NGOs activities.

(c) A mechanism should be established whereby headquarters and country level NGO liaison officers would share their experiences. This way both officials are informed of each other's activities.

24. The Unit's idea of following and coordinating the activities of NGOs through various mechanisms at the headquarters and country levels is supported in principle by ACC. According to ACC members' comments, the coordination of activities with NGOs is mainly carried out by external relations offices or special coordinators established specifically for those purposes. In the field, those functions are assigned to the agencies' country directors, representatives or focal points. In the case of UNHCR, for instance, the setting up of inter-NGO committees as well as government/UNHCR/NGO coordinating committees in all country programmes is in process. FAO has established at its headquarters a special office responsible for liaison with NGOs: the Unit for Cooperation with the Private Sector and NGOs, which has access to financial information regarding FAO/NGO cooperation and reviews proposals for projects to be carried out in partnership with NGOs.

25. ACC reaffirms the decision of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions, concerning the assessment of the need to establish an inter-agency mechanism to bring together NGO focal points on programme and operational issues.

26. At the same time, several ACC members have expressed doubts similar to those related to recommendation 1, namely, whether it would be financially justified for all the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system to establish full-time NGO liaison officers at the headquarters and country levels. They also strongly believe that there cannot be a blanket job description for the headquarters NGO liaison officer, but his or her functions should rather be

determined in line with other responsibilities within the organization. They also do not share the view contained in subparagraph (b) of recommendation 2 that national officers should necessarily be responsible for coordination with the Government, other national institutions and local NGO umbrella organizations. While national officers do indeed have a useful role to play, one of the most important considerations should be the objectivity of the officer in determining which organizations should be selected as partners. In this regard, they have some doubts whether national officers will always be completely impartial. They also strongly believe that national officers should not report to a Chief Technical Adviser unless it is related to a specific project, but rather to country and regional directors, who are responsible for the overall programme in the area covered.

27. Some ACC members expressed their regret that their activities and positive experience in the area considered in recommendation 2 had not been reflected in the study. Thus, for instance, with regard to the Unit's appeal to develop better knowledge of national and local organizations, the Department of Public Information, both at Headquarters and in the field (United Nations Information Centres and United Nations International Schools), has maintained the longest relationship (since 1946) with operational and advocacy NGOs interested in the priorities of the United Nations, and this experience and knowledge should necessarily be included in any future inter-agency coordinating initiatives. At the country level, United Nations Information Centres and United Nations International Schools have very rich experience in working with government agencies, other national institutions and local NGOs, including NGO umbrella organizations, and can provide qualified advice to any agency's staff members involved in activities in a given country. Similar experience has been accumulated by many other organizations and agencies, which should have been taken into account by JIU.

Recommendation 3

All United Nations operational organizations should evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a budget line for NGO activities without prejudice for technical cooperation programmes to benefit from additional sources of funds.

Recommendation 4

The Economic and Social Council in its proposal to the General Assembly on the updating of its resolution 1296 (XIV) of 1968 (E/1996/L.25, para. 6) specified that "Greater participation of non-governmental organizations from developing countries in international conferences convened by the United Nations should be encouraged". The Inspector agrees fully with this proposal and makes the following suggestions:

Organizations not involved in operational activities, such as those mostly at the headquarters level, should envisage a budget line with limited resources to enable them to provide administrative assistance to NGOs in general and particularly those coming from developing countries and from countries with economies in transition to attend meetings, seminars, conferences and workshops. An appropriate procedure should be developed for providing funds.

28. Many ACC members agree in general with the proposals contained in recommendations 3 and 4. Their main argument for such a view is that, since it is an established policy, the United Nations should cooperate more closely with NGOs. More resources, including a clear budget line, will be needed to meet the needs of NGOs. With regard to recommendation 4, the adoption by the Economic and Social Council of its resolution 1996/31 on consultative arrangements with NGOs, as well as the follow-up to various world conferences, will result in bringing more national NGOs to the United Nations. For NGOs to make a useful contribution to United Nations activities, they will need particular assistance, and the proposal of establishing a budget line can be supported. That budget line should include such items as staffing, meetings and consultations, equipment and travel.

29. Other ACC members comment that they currently have no regular budget funds to be allocated directly to NGO activities. However, their programmes and projects with NGOs are financed from extrabudgetary resources and are implemented on a cost-sharing basis or are financed from third-party contributions. Innovative types of financial cooperation between the public and private sectors are also being fostered. In the case of UNDP, its new programming cycle will rely upon three major categories for funding programmes and projects, namely: (a) global programme funds that go towards supporting cross-cutting issues related to sustainable human development; (b) regional programme funds to be used by the regional bureaux for supporting the main thematic areas of UNDP (e.g., poverty eradication, environmental protection, women in development); and (c) country-level resources used for activities at the national level. In this context, UNDP support to NGOs will come from a combination of the above resources, and UNDP is still in the process of determining how the allocation of those funds will be monitored.

30. Several organizations and agencies have some reservations concerning recommendations 3 and 4. They believe that the most important thing is to involve relevant and credible NGOs in the implementation of programmes and projects of the United Nations operational organizations. If so, such involvement could be effective without the need to establish a separate budget line for NGO activities within a specific project. With regard to recommendation 4, they feel that resources should be devoted to financing the participation of NGOs from developing countries and economies in transition in world conferences, meetings, seminars and workshops, rather than to administrative assistance to facilitate the attendance of NGOs at such forums. This could be effected through closer collaboration among organizations and agencies, with or without operational activities.

31. For some ACC members the concept of establishing a budget line, mentioned in both recommendations, is not clear, nor does it seem very realistic. They argue that it would be difficult to establish such a budget line, since the vast majority of an agency's contributions are earmarked for specific technical cooperation projects. In many agencies, funds to support NGO activities in the field are mobilized from extrabudgetary sources on the basis of specific programme proposals. Limited regular programme funds could be available to facilitate the participation of NGOs in international conferences, meetings, seminars and other forums, as suggested in recommendation 4, if so endorsed by

the respective governing bodies, but extrabudgetary funds are more often sought for those purposes.

32. The representative of one agency commented that, given its specific structure and the role of workers' and employers' organizations in its activities, the current scope of involvement of other NGOs in its work does not justify the establishment of a specific budget line for them. It also questioned the meaning of "administrative assistance" to be provided to NGOs to facilitate their participation in the above-mentioned international forums. The agency argued that if it refers to hotel accommodations or ticket reservations, then it is the job of a travel agency. If the intention is to provide NGOs with information about meetings and seminars, there is no need to allocate extra resources, since every United Nations agency has staff who are specifically responsible for providing this kind of information.

Recommendation 5

There is a need for policy guidelines which satisfy the current requirements for collaboration with NGOs. In addition to the Economic and Social Council framework for collaboration with NGOs, the operational organizations should establish their own policy guidelines in accordance with their mandates. Some organizations have already taken this initiative and have established such guidelines.

Therefore, those organizations which are collaborating with NGOs and which have not yet established policy guidelines for cooperating with NGOs in project implementation should proceed to formulate them. The policy guidelines should include, among other things, basic NGO selection criteria such as the NGO's credibility and accountability; administration and budgetary standards; lower cost compared to other implementing partners; familiarity with the local population; flexibility in responding to development needs; and long-term commitment to development.

33. ACC had no difficulty in supporting this recommendation, since most of the organizations and agencies have established their own policy guidelines in accordance with their mandates, and others are in the process of elaborating such guidelines or reviewing the existing ones to ensure that there is maximum accountability and maintenance of acceptable standards by NGO partners. They also try to ensure that the guidelines include the main criteria to be fulfilled by NGOs applying for consultative status, such as being of a representative character and having a recognized standing, as well as having an established record in areas falling within the competence of a given agency. As far as NGO selection is concerned, there is a view that international NGOs, Governments or UNDP regional offices and agencies' country directors will eventually be able to recommend suitable national or local NGOs.

34. In the process of developing its policy guidelines for collaboration with NGOs, UNDP has found it to be a rather complicated exercise, and has expressed some views that could be of interest to other organizations and agencies. UNDP officially decided to expand its cooperation to a broader range of civil society organizations, including traditional service delivery NGOs, trade unions, membership organizations, the media, church-based groups and the like. Lessons

learned from this process have been an explicit recognition that the voluntary sector is extremely diverse in its functions and forms, and therefore a blueprint may not be appropriate, given the fact that civil society organizations are accountable to a number of stakeholders, including the United Nations system agencies with whom they cooperate, the organization's own constituency and government bodies providing financial support to its activities. In this regard, UNDP wonders if it might be more effective to develop country-specific guidelines for funding while providing a broader policy framework that outlines both the constraints and the benefits of working with civil society organizations in the context of sustainable human development.

Recommendation 6

The current climate of intense donor government interest in the proper use of funds in all areas of activities, including the non-governmental sector, highlights the need for the United Nations organizations to identify easily the resources they receive and be able to account for them, regardless of the size and the nature of the funds. In order to respond to this concern and in line with the intention of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions to address the same issue, the following steps should be taken:

(a) Since the primary accountability and responsibility for funds it receives from donors lies with the organization, it should be in a position to identify the resources it spends or allocates for NGO activities and know how these funds are disbursed;

(b) Organizations which have not yet established a control system should do so within the framework of the letter of understanding or other suitable instruments. They should pay attention to accountability when reporting to their governing bodies on cooperation with NGOs and on the use by them of extrabudgetary and/or supplementary financial resources including funds received from NGOs.

35. A majority of ACC members support this recommendation, since accountability is an intrinsic prerequisite in agencies' technical cooperation programmes and projects. The steps taken by organizations and agencies in the area under consideration in this recommendation include, inter alia, the establishment of trust fund accounts for all resources received for the implementation of technical cooperation programmes, consultations with the donors to review the implementation of project activities and the utilization of funds allocated for the purpose as provided in individual project documents and the submission of audited accounts to the respective governing bodies. These and other steps serve as the basis not only for improving accountability of NGOs, but also for ensuring higher standards of delivery and improved operational practices.

36. Several ACC members, however, have different views with regard to this recommendation. Judging from their own practices, they state that there is no need for the proposed control system. They believe that the current procedures for monitoring implementation and evaluation provide an adequate framework for accountable and transparent operations, since they adopt with NGOs the same instruments governing transfer of financial resources as they employ for other categories of external partners and apply the same control systems.

Recommendation 7

United Nations system organizations are increasingly aware of the advantage of working with national NGOs in certain areas of their activities, because of their knowledge of and roots in the local situation and the contribution they can make to building equitable and stable societies. In addition, by working with national NGOs the system could contribute more effectively to the country's economic and social development. To achieve this objective, in addition to the support for the Government, the following concrete comprehensive measures should be taken:

(a) United Nations system organizations, in particular the operational organizations, should establish, possibly at Headquarters or at least at the country level, a list of national NGOs and other organizations of civil society that could be potential partners of the United Nations system and the international NGOs. This information should be included in the database proposed in recommendation 1;

(b) Greater consideration should also be given to strengthening government capacities to maintain effective records of national registered organizations;

(c) The Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions may examine the possibility of using the database collected by the organizations to prepare a compendium of national NGOs for the use of the system taking into account the work that is already done in this area by the Non-Governmental Liaison Service. Sharing and exchange of information on national NGOs among the United Nations system organizations is recommended, especially at the country level;

(d) United Nations system organizations should give active consideration to the involvement of national NGOs in the entire project cycle from identification, formulation and implementation partners. In the programme agreement between the Government and the organization, cooperation with national NGOs should be referred to when such cooperation is considered beneficial to the overall programme. United Nations system organizations should, as appropriate, assist national NGOs to formulate, mobilize resources for and implement programmes in support of their activities, in the context of capacity-building;

(e) All United Nations organizations, in particular UNDP, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund, should establish a system for training the staff of national NGOs, inter alia, on accounting, preparation and management of projects and reporting, as well as on how to coordinate and collaborate with the United Nations system and the international NGOs and on what is expected of national NGOs in order to become a partner of the international community supporting development;

(f) In view of the fact that the national NGOs, in particular in developing countries, do not have the same administrative, managerial and legal capacity as the international NGOs, flexible selection criteria should be established which take into account credibility, representativeness and competence;

(g) In the light of the foreseen significant advantages of closer cooperation with national NGOs to enhance the effectiveness and impact of United Nations activities, organizations should make the requisite efforts to give appropriate attention to the improvement of the mutual confidence between NGOs and Member States.

37. The general thrust of this recommendation, namely, the need for more active involvement of national NGOs in the country's economic and social development, is strongly supported by ACC members, since all the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, especially those with operational activities, are well aware of all the benefits of NGO contributions to building equitable and stable societies. They also agree with the views of the JIU concerning the need to involve NGOs in the entire project cycle, from formulation to implementation; the establishment of a system for training staff of national NGOs, in particular by the United Nations funds and programmes; developing a flexible NGO selection criteria; and so on.

38. With regard to the proposal contained in subparagraph (a) of this recommendation, ACC members' comments are similar to those related to recommendation 1.

39. The proposal in subparagraph (c) is arguable, since a given agency is not interested in all the NGOs, but only in those involved in activities of a specific area of competence of that agency. In this regard, ACC members are warning against the assumption of the JIU that United Nations system cooperation with NGOs is entirely development-oriented, which is not the case. There is another view related to this proposal, namely, that instead of asking each organization and agency of the United Nations system to prepare a list of national NGOs that could be potential partners of the system, UNDP should be requested to develop and update periodically, in collaboration with other agencies concerned, a list of NGOs that have the experience of working with different organizations and agencies. That view, if accepted, should be further considered in detail.

UNITED NATIONS

A E

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

A/52/115
E/1997/47
10 April 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Fifty-second session
Items 101 and 120 of the
preliminary list*
OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR
DEVELOPMENT
JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Substantive session of 1997
Item 6 of the provisional
agenda**
COORDINATION, PROGRAMME AND
OTHER QUESTIONS

Coordination of policy and programming frameworks for more effective development cooperation

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Coordination of policy and programming frameworks for more effective development cooperation" (A/51/636-E/1996/104, annex).

* A/52/50.

** E/1997/100.

97-09717 (E) 280497 010597

/...

ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Coordination of policy and programming frameworks for more effective development cooperation"

I. INTRODUCTION

1. As indicated by the Inspector in the introduction to the study, the main purpose of the report is to contribute to the ongoing efforts by Member States to rationalize the operations of the complex network of multilateral development cooperation institutions in order to ensure optimum efficiency, integrated approaches and lower overhead costs in their support of developing countries. The Inspector has based the report on the premise that one way of achieving that objective is to integrate or harmonize to the extent possible the numerous policy and programming institutional formats, mechanisms or frames of reference, defined in the study as "frameworks", which are used by organizations and the donor community to formulate, implement and evaluate their development cooperation policies, strategies, programmes and projects.

2. On the basis of his field investigations and information received in the process of his contacts at the headquarters of a number of organizations, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, as well as with government officials in developing countries, and the review of current policy frameworks established by the General Assembly, the Inspector supports the view that, against the background of the contracting volume of official development assistance and the resource crisis prevailing throughout the United Nations system, there is an urgent need for more systematic coordination of the organizations' development policies and programmes, and the integrated channelling of catalytic resources towards high-priority needs of recipient countries. The author of the study has made a number of recommendations addressed to the organizations of the United Nations system. Governments of donor and recipient countries and, inter-governmental bodies that are aimed at enhancing coordination of international development cooperation at the national, regional and global levels. Some specific recommendations relate to the system-wide coordination and oversight functions of the Economic and Social Council, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, in the conduct of international development cooperation.

II. GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The Administrative Committee on Coordination agrees with the Inspector that in an environment of scarce financial resources, when no one can afford to duplicate activities undertaken by different parts of the system, the issue of better coordination is of great importance. Consequently, the United Nations has been engaged in far-reaching reform to that effect for some time. While the report's main focus is on policy and programming frameworks, it also covers a number of related aspects. The substance of the report deals in particular with funds and programmes of the United Nations development system, such as the

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) or the World Food Programme (WFP) that operate within specific country or inter-country frameworks.

4. Thus, while dealing with relevant issues relating to coordination and harmonization of operational activities, the report could have addressed the larger issue of aid coordination in greater depth. Moreover, since the assistance provided from other multilateral and bilateral sources often exceeds by far the volume of the assistance provided through the United Nations system, the report also needed to address that question in greater depth as well.

5. While the report provides an overview and some assessment of the roles and responsibilities of the various development partners involved and of the major instruments developed by the system, it essentially covers familiar ground. The suggestion that the linkage between field realities and global actions can be tenuous and that the implementation of policy directives requires persistent action at various levels is a well-known fact that is being addressed through extensive use of training workshops, seminars and other modalities to link all levels of the system.

6. Members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination agree with the emphasis on the lead role of Governments, which have the main responsibility for the coordination of all external inputs in support of national development. The report rightly indicates a number of areas that are of common concern to the United Nations system. In particular, the multiplicity of programming procedures imposes a considerable burden on Governments. In that context, the report correctly observes that countries having greater needs for assistance, such as the least developed countries, are particularly affected, because of their limited capacity, by the variety of programming policies and procedures, which should, therefore, be streamlined.

7. While the Committee agrees with the general thrust of the conclusions and recommendations and with the Inspector's view that more should be done to improve coordination of the development activities of the United Nations system, it also mentions that the report suffers from a number of shortcomings that diminish its value.

8. In this connection, the Administrative Committee on Coordination notes that the report covers issues in broad areas that have already received considerable attention by the United Nations system, in particular, through the triennial policy reviews by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. Moreover, while the subject of the report is important and relevant, its general thrust is primarily to exhort concerned organizations to implement the known provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/120 of 20 December 1995 and other legislation. The findings and recommendations of the report are thus hardly new and many could be found in earlier Joint Inspection Unit reports, in reports of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly and ensuing resolutions, as well as in the numerous proposals submitted to working groups of the Assembly on the reform of the United Nations. They are also being addressed at the inter-agency level, more particularly in the Administrative Committee on Coordination and in the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions, the Joint Consultative Group on Policy and

so on. It would thus have been more helpful to identify best practices and other practical elements to facilitate implementation at the country level of those established policies.

9. Unfortunately, the report does not take sufficient account of recent developments in the areas under consideration. Moreover, by moving in a general way between various levels - the country, the region, the United Nations system, the intergovernmental process - the report makes insufficient distinctions between operational activities at those levels, and therefore sometimes offers an oversimplified analysis that leads to conclusions and recommendations that, while well intentioned, either have been firmly rejected by Governments outside operational realities or are, in fact, already in the process of being implemented.

10. Consequently, the Administrative Committee on Coordination would like to note that a number of proposals contained in the text of the report, as well as in the recommendations, have been overtaken by events and do not need further comment at the present time.

11. Some members of the Administrative Committee expressed their concern that their preliminary comments on section V of the draft report had not been taken into consideration by the Inspector, which, in their view, had weakened the usefulness of the recommendations made.

III. COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1. Country strategy note (paras. 56 and 57)

(a) Host Governments should, with the assistance of resident coordinators as needed, ensure that the Country Strategy Note (CSN) process is used effectively and consistently by all external development partners for the integrated programming and implementation of their inputs in conformity with the programme approach guidelines;

(b) The CSN framework should be encouraged in all countries, with significant involvement of the United Nations system and other major donors, and it should replace or subsume other multisectoral programming frameworks at the country level in order to reduce the cost, frequency and workloads entailed in overlapping country programming exercises; more specific sectoral programmes may be prepared on the basis of the CSN;

(c) Subject to (a) and (b) above, countries with significant structural adjustment programmes financed by the multilateral financial institutions in the context of their policy framework papers (PFP), may either dispense with the CSN or design it to support the efficient implementation of such programmes to enhance the prospects of their success and impact. In that event, the CSN could have the same time-frame as the PFP;

(d) The resident coordinators should fully implement relevant Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions guidelines

regarding agencies without country representation by ensuring their technical contributions to the CSN process;

(e) The Administrative Committee on Coordination should update the policy and operational parameters for the preparation, design and implementation of the CSN, incorporating, as appropriate, the observations and new elements outlined in paragraph 67 herein;

(f) The development cooperation report prepared by the resident coordinators could be used to monitor and report on annual progress in the implementation of the CSN where applicable.

12. Members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination support the proposal contained in recommendation 1 that Governments should make effective and consistent use of the instruments developed by the United Nations system, such as the country strategy note (CSN), to facilitate integrated programming and implementation of development activities and of the services available through the United Nations system. These should include the inputs made by the United Nations agencies at all levels: country, regional, subregional and headquarters.

13. The Administrative Committee on Coordination notes with regret that this recommendation blurs the distinction between the CSN and programming. Thus, the report suggests (para. 61), that the CSN may replace other major programming exercises, while the CSN is not a programming exercise: although it identifies strategic lines and orientations, it does not involve operational programming. On the other hand, the report suggests that recipient Governments may decide to use the CSN instead of other programming frameworks. This idea would need to be very carefully reviewed against existing mandates and operational requirements.

14. Specifically with regard to recommendation 1 (b), on improving the CSN process, the Inspector appears to miss the point of the CSN, viewing it as something that can replace or subsume other programming frameworks. It should be noted, that as a voluntary initiative of recipient countries (General Assembly resolution 50/120, para. 17), the CSN was never intended to replace programming frameworks, but to provide a conceptual and strategic framework for all operational activities of the United Nations system. Since not all countries have agreed to CSNs, and governing bodies of individual funds require separate detailed frameworks, the CSN would not be able to take their place.

15. Members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination accept that the framework for United Nations system inputs is the national development plan or similar national priority-setting document. Therefore, the CSN, where adopted by the Government, is based on the national development plan, which includes programmes to be supported from all sources of funds, domestic and external.

16. The report amplifies and supplements the principles and guidance elements for preparation of the CSN as the principal instrument of achieving coherence in, and coordination of development cooperation initiatives. The CSN, drawing upon the participation of all concerned partners in development, should facilitate efficient programming and delivery of assistance, including that for

capacity-building. The Administrative Committee agrees that the approach to country-level coordination of development cooperation should be collegial.

17. It is the view of the Administrative Committee that the recommendation contained in subparagraph 1 (e), on updating the CSN parameters, is well taken by the author. The question is being reviewed at inter-agency level through the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions and the triennial policy review.

18. The Administrative Committee on Coordination notes that some improvements in the preparatory process of the CSN are being considered, inter alia, to enable regional commissions to provide a regional dimension to the efforts exerted by the resident coordinators, which should also lead to strengthened linkages between the activities at the regional and national levels.

Recommendation 2. Periodic evaluation of policy and programming frameworks (paras. 11-22)

Each organization should periodically evaluate its technical assistance policy and programming framework(s) to establish their cost-benefits for the host countries and for the organizations themselves, as well as their consistency with the CSN process, programme approach and resource mobilization potential.

19. The Administrative Committee on Coordination in general welcomes the proposal contained in recommendation 2 that each organization should periodically evaluate its technical assistance policy and programming framework(s) to ascertain their costs and benefits. The modality of doing this should be left to the concerned organizations. Moreover, it is important that such evaluations help strengthen the CSN process over time and also help make the development interventions synergistic, cost-effective and more focused.

20. While endorsing the recommendation, members of the Administrative Committee attach particular importance to the efforts of Governments to increase their capacity to coordinate development activities. It would seem, therefore, necessary to link evaluations of United Nations technical assistance to the absorptive capacity of the host Government and to its ability to manage and deliver that assistance on an ongoing basis, considering that national execution is the norm for implementation of United Nations technical assistance. In other words, the question of national ownership must be seen as the corollary of the evaluation of the technical assistance policy and programming frameworks.

21. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has stated that the recommendation concerning the evaluation of the country programme frameworks was found not to be useful for the Agency and it has issued a separate report on the matter.[1]

Recommendation 3. System-wide standard formats for development cooperation (para. 67)

(a) Recognizing the limited implementation to date of existing General Assembly directives in this area, the Administrative Committee on Coordination should intensify its efforts to achieve system-wide standard formats for field data collection, situation analysis or development needs assessments, reporting cycles, evaluation and accountability requirements in order to facilitate joint programming and implementation in furtherance of the programme approach and the CSN process;

(b) Considering the very general character of existing Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions guidelines on the resident coordinator system, the Administrative Committee on Coordination should formulate and agree upon a standard set of more specific and binding administrative instructions to be issued by each executive head to his/her field representatives requiring their active and consistent support for the resident coordinator system, as an integral part of their job descriptions.

Recommendation 4. Inter-agency development information facility (data bank) in the resident coordinator's office (paras. 54 and 55)

In the perspective of recommendation 3 above, and in order to integrate efficiently the existing separate information systems of the organizations at the country level, an inter-agency development information facility (data bank) for each developing country should be established in the resident coordinator's office using a part of the resources earmarked by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Executive Board for strengthening the resident coordinator system. The proposed information facility (data bank) should be fed and maintained by all the organizations in their respective areas of competence and should be accessible, through electronic media, especially the Internet where possible, to the international development community, locally and externally.

22. As can be seen from the context of both recommendations, they make reference to common data banks and data collection at the field level, although the two sets of recommendations do not seem to be related to each other, and, in the view of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, the links between the two should have been clarified in order to establish their operational relevance.

23. With regard to recommendation 3, members of the Administrative Committee agree in principle with the general idea of the proposal contained therein. They agree that the system-wide standardization of data collection, situation analysis and needs assessment is a good idea, provided that any standard formats result from an inventory of best practice within the field of development cooperation and are actively and universally adopted and implemented. Some initial steps were taken to test how best to implement the concept with a particular focus at the present stage on cooperation among the funds and programmes of the United Nations.

24. Members of the Committee note that recommendation 4 does not contain any new ideas, since it has been widely recognized that the programme approach requires inter-agency collaboration in the field at various stages of programme development and implementation. This is the essence of the current Administrative Committee on Coordination guidelines on the programme approach. To the extent that the Joint Inspection Unit's report encourages collaborative programming and implementation based on the programme approach concept and the framework provided by the CSN, this is consistent with relevant intergovernmental directives and Administrative Committee on Coordination agreements. An essential basis for collaborative programming and implementation is a common data bank.

25. With regard to paragraph 54 of the report, which has served as a basis for recommendation 4, some members of the Administrative Committee point out that the establishment of a common database is being implemented and guidelines are under preparation in the subgroup on harmonization of policies and procedures of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy. To date, over 80 countries have expressed interest in proceeding with the development of common data banks. The specific objective is to achieve a common country assessment by the members of the Joint Consultative Group of which a common database is a centrepiece. Efforts are being initiated to include other parts of the system in the exercise. In that connection, it is necessary to ensure that the limited resources that are available for development cooperation activities are not dissipated through the establishment of new systems, which may duplicate the important work that is already being carried out by the organizations of the United Nations development system. There is therefore a need to assess realistically the technical, cost and other resource implications for establishing and maintaining the databases. Thought should also be given further to assist interested Governments in establishing such a database that would directly enhance their capacity to exercise their coordination role.

26. On a related point, the Inspector seems not to be aware that the funds allocated by UNDP to the resident coordinator function would be insufficient to cover the basic assignment of the resident coordinator, let alone leave some over for other activities, as suggested by the report.

Recommendation 5. Field-level coordination committees (paras. 48-51)

In addition to the meetings of all external development partners, country-level coordination committees, sectoral subcommittees and thematic working groups and task forces should be used more systematically, with the necessary technical inputs of headquarters, regional and/or subregional offices, as mechanisms for policy dialogue and for the integrated development of country and sectoral programmes.

27. It should be noted that this recommendation is essentially a repetition of paragraphs 36 and 41 of General Assembly resolution 50/120 regarding field-level coordination committees, which are in the process of being implemented in accordance with the management process on the subject submitted to the substantive session of 1996 of the Economic and Social Council. Moreover, such cooperation at the field level is already operational in several countries.

notably in the preparation of donors' round-table conferences, and in responding to thematic issues.

Recommendation 6. Regional and subregional coordination (paras. 68-75)

(a) Cooperation between the regional commissions and other organizations of the system should continue to include the mutual review of draft regional strategies and programmes of cooperation;

(b) In order to enhance the national ownership of inter-country programmes, the organizations should establish strong linkages between country and inter-country programmes, inter alia, by supporting institutional networks within each economic cooperation grouping in the different regions, and by promoting the implementation of the decisions of such groupings at the country level in the context of the CSN and country programming processes;

(c) All the organizations should endeavour to harmonize their regional programme cycles in consultation and coordination with the regional commissions.

28. In supporting recommendation 6, members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination underline that they maintain close working relationships with international, regional/subregional and national organizations and research institutions for consultation and coordination of development activities. At the same time, they would like to note that recommendation 6 refers to strategies and programmes of cooperation at regional and subregional levels that do not seem to exist or still have a very limited diffusion. In fact, the reason for including a regional dimension in General Assembly resolution 50/120 was specifically aimed at expanding such a dimension. This provision of the resolution is in the process of being implemented for review by the Economic and Social Council in July 1997.

29. The provisions of subparagraph (a) are being effected through such mechanisms as the Regional Inter-agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific under the chairmanship of the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and its subsidiary committees, which discuss specific programme cooperation and coordination issues to follow-up on regional strategies and plans or programmes of action.

30. As for subparagraph (b), annual consultations are carried out between the Executive Secretary of ESCAP and the heads of subregional intergovernmental bodies, namely, the Association of South-East Asian Nations, the Economic Cooperation Organization, the South Pacific Commission and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, to discuss measures for cooperation in identified areas such as trade and investment, transport and communications, human resource development and energy.

31. With regard to subparagraph (c), it is important to recall that not all organizations operate at a regional level and that those which do are already addressing the points raised by the recommendation. UNDP, for example, has

established a bilateral working group with the regional commissions, chaired by the Associate Administrator.

32. In the view of the members of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, it would be useful if the regional programme cycles of all organizations of the United Nations development system, including the regional commissions, could be harmonized. What is important is to ensure that the scarce resources that are available to the system are not thinly spread. In that regard, the view contained in paragraph 75 of the report, namely, that the regional commissions serve as the main development forum for reviewing and interconnecting the different sectoral and cross-sectoral regional programmes of the organizations, in draft form, prior to approval by the governing bodies, deserves further consideration. The current situation in which individual governing bodies determine their own sets of priorities for the same region, have resulted in inconsistencies and caused confusion; it also hampers positive action by the United Nations development system as a whole. A consistent set of priorities in development cooperation on the part of Member States, coupled with enhanced coordination and genuine cooperation among the organizations of the United Nations development system, would enhance efficiency and the cost-effectiveness of development cooperation and would contribute to achieving results that truly benefit the developing countries.

33. Thus, for instance, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), pursuant to recent calls by the Secretary-General for coordination of activities of the United Nations system at the regional level, initiated consultations with regional offices of the United Nations entities based in and outside Jordan, which has led to the establishment of a regional inter-agency coordination group.

Recommendation 7. Role of the Economic and Social Council (paras. 76-83)

(a) The Economic and Social Council should further strengthen its coordination and oversight functions under the Charter, by exploring, as a first step, the practical feasibility of instituting/expanding joint sessions, together with a common agenda, of the executive boards of the United Nations programmes and funds for the consideration of specific coordination issues, including, inter alia, CSNs and country programmes, and the specialized agencies may be invited to participate in such sessions as they may deem appropriate;

(b) The next step could be the creation of a unified or single executive board as a committee of the Council while preserving the identities and mandates of the programmes and funds concerned;

(c) In connection with (a) and (b) above, the Council may request the relevant United Nations programmes and funds to intensify efforts to achieve a standard format for the formulation and presentation of their development cooperation programmes and related budgets, in order to strengthen cross-organizational linkages and coherence;

(d) Furthermore, the Council should assign priority to seeking system-wide conformity with General Assembly resolutions relating to

coordination issues in the economic, social and related sectors through specific recommendations thereon to the governing bodies of the specialized agencies.

34. The Administrative Committee on Coordination would like to point out that the provisions of recommendation 7 enter into political areas that are the domain of Member States, which recently agreed to General Assembly resolution 50/227 of 24 May 1996, as a first step in reforms at this level.

35. Members of the Administrative Committee note that the funds and programmes of the United Nations system have made considerable progress, in particular, on joint sessions of their governing bodies and also on common reporting formats to the Economic and Social Council, as suggested in recommendation 7. Moreover, the proposals contained in subparagraphs (b) and (c) refer to actions that have already been taken by the Council.

36. While recommendation 7 is addressed primarily to the Economic and Social Council and United Nations programmes and funds, there are specific suggestions in the text of the report that relate to the specialized agencies. Certain Committee members therefore point out that they have a broad mandate in technical and normative fields beyond the scope of the operational activities that are of direct interest to the Council.

37. Some members of the Committee have strong reservations as to the feasibility of joint meetings and, as the next step, a move towards a single executive board under the Council to govern the United Nations programmes and funds, and the proposal concerning joint reporting by the executive boards, since, in their view, such recommendations have considerable implications for the funds and programmes and their governing bodies. The specific questions raised in that regard are, for instance, whether all the 36 members of the WFP Board should come to New York to participate in a joint session of the UNDP/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF Boards, or whether missions of 72 members of the boards of the New York-based funds and programmes to WFP headquarters in Rome would be required. Serious doubts concerning joint reporting are based on the need to clear those reports by all the boards of the funds and programmes, which would need four separate sessions of the respective governing bodies.

38. The Administrative Committee on Coordination looks forward to further guidance from the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in the future concerning all the proposals contained in recommendation 7 of the Joint Inspection Unit report.

Notes

[1] IAEA/SER/96/01.